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ABSTRACT

It is often claimed that John the Evangelist, the putative author of the Fourth Gospel, was identified in ecclesiastical sources with John the son of Zebedee from the latter part of the second century or earlier. In contrast, this study will argue that John the Evangelist was variously identified with at least three figures, John the Elder, John/Mark and John the son of Zebedee, and that diverse, sometimes conflicting narratives were attributed to him before the contours of the traditional narrative took shape under Eusebius of Caesarea in the early fourth century.

The first section of this study will argue that the earliest sources likely identified the Evangelist with a secondary John referred to by Papias in the early second century or earlier as John the Elder. It will further maintain that as the Evangelist and Apostle came to be identified from the third century onward, the previously separate traditions associated with these two figures were conflated, creating new narratives and introducing variations with respect to the chronological placement of John's banishment and the time and manner of his death. This process, it will be concluded, culminated with Eusebius' construction of a revised Johannine narrative which came to form the standard narrative for subsequent writers.

In the second section of this study, an examination of early and medieval sources will suggest that the Evangelist/Beloved Disciple might have sometimes been identified with the John also known as Mark. Evidence for this will include the depiction of John/Mark in Markan sources as a Johannine figure, if not the Beloved Disciple; the reduplication of Markan traditions under the name of John in western sources; the attribution to Mark of a Johannine-type Gospel; and the correlation in extant sources of the basic geographical and chronological contours of their lives.